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Race, Sex & Education

Sensitivity Before Sense

For the past three years I have been reading, out of parental curiosity, the student newspaper of a certain university.

It is a good university, the students bright and socially conscious, the administration sensitive and at times openly self-critical. The paper, its columnists and letter-writers all appear deeply concerned about racial and sexual prejudice. One issue devoted three-quarters of the front page to stories on the topic. The administration is apparently spending a great deal of time wrestling with the matter as well.

But something's wrong: During three years in which the university's racial and sexual problems have been exposed, analyzed, protested and treated, matters only seem to have gotten worse.

I can't fault either the energy or the intent of those who have been involved. They have made the statements and taken the actions currently expected of those desiring to end discrimination and encourage pluralism. But it's not working. Everyone is on edge, everyone is talking about it, and the problems continue.

Of course this university is not alone. 173 racial incidents were reported on American campuses in 1988. The city of New York says that its bias-related crimes increased over 200% between 1983 and 1988. Targets of the crimes belonged to six different ethnic groups. Jews were attacked almost as frequently as blacks, other whites almost two-thirds as frequently as Jews. Hate, allowed to flourish, becomes an equal opportunity destroyer.

Even at a time when white Americans were demonstrating a new willingness to elect black candidates to high office, race dominated American politics as it hasn't in many years. A Nexus News Monitor study of coverage of elections in seven major cities by 650 newspapers, magazines and wire services, found 5201 stories about race (mostly concerning racial divisions) and only 1,012 about taxes.

Given the policies of the Reagan-Bush years, the current situation is not surprising. Not only have restraints on discrimination been dramatically loosened but distorted economic priorities have made large numbers of Americans competitors for a lesser share of the pie. Further, the young are learning that they may be the first generation of Americans who can not expect to do better than their parents. Real income is going down, housing is becoming disproportionately expensive, and new jobs are being largely created at the bottom of the economy. One congressional study found even new jobs for young white males were almost entirely in the lowest paying categories. Everyone is hurting. And there are always those -- a Louis Farrakhan or a Roger Ailes -- to take advantage of the situation and make things worse.

We could, of course, reduce the overcrowding of the American dream by expanding economic opportunity for all. Years ago economist Leon Keyserling pointed out that the large numbers of men who died in the sinking of the *Titanic* did so not because they had the special characteristics of men, as opposed to those of women and children who were saved. They died because there weren't enough lifeboats. Given today's economic conditions, we find ourselves involved in a similar form of social triage, only this time it's blacks and latinos who don't make it to the lifeboats.

We could also reduce racial tensions in this country by ending our infatuation with success. More than four decades ago, anthropologist Ashley Montague noted the connection between the success ethic and prejudice:

*The spirit of aggressive competition is inculcated in the young American almost as soon as he is capable of understanding what is required of him. He soon learns that his parents's love is conditioned upon how he compares -- measures up -- with others; he must compete and be successful. *** All potential competing persons and groups, as a consequence of such a process of socialization, come to be regarded as rivals,*

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*and inevitably they will be regarded with varying degrees of hostility and fear. The frustrations of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adult life, which have been either wholly or partially repressed, find a very ready outlet in the sanctioned aggressiveness which the American competitive system of living encourages. *** Race prejudice constitutes a socially sanctioned outlet for the resulting accumulated aggressiveness; this at once serves to explain the person's failure to himself and at the same time enables him to revenge himself upon the imagined cause of it.*

This factor may help to explain why the prejudice of the 80s has found such easy expression on college campuses -- they are, after all, the very places we send our children to become successful.

Obviously a new economic order or new social values are not around the corner and thus offer little comfort to those being hurt right now. We are not, however, helpless. We can, for example, look critically at some of the ways we have tried to help and examine why they haven't worked as well as they were supposed to.

Weight of the ages

The concept of race and sex is as good a place to start as any. Race, in a scientific sense, serves only as a crude but convenient taxonomic device. Its utility beyond that is extremely limited. Julian Huxley suggested in 1941 that "It would be highly desirable if we could banish the question-begging term 'race' from all discussions of human affairs and substitute the noncommittal phrase 'ethnic group.' That would be a first step toward rational consideration of the problem at hand."

The concept of race that most of us have comes not from science but from religion, literature, politics and the oral tradition. It comes to us creaking under the weight of a past loaded with the prejudices of the ages. It reeks of territoriality, of jingoism, of subjugation and of the abuse of power. It is hard to think, in fact, of an occasion in which the social concept of race has been used in a productive manner. The mere term implies prejudice because that has been overwhelmingly its social function: to sanction and define prejudice. It is a concept that may someday seem mainly a grim reminder of our brutal past just as the word *slavery* is today.

While there is certainly a sound biological concept of sex, this is not the concept that controls most of our thinking about the subject. Rather we are living with social and historical variations on a biological fact. The roles assigned to men and women in a culture only use biology as a beginning. The anthropologist Ralph Linton once noted:

All societies prescribe different attitudes and activities to men and women. Most of them try to rationalize these prescriptions in terms of the physiological differences between the sexes or their different roles in reproduction. However, a comparative study of the statuses ascribed to women and men in different cultures seems to show that while such factors may have served as a starting point for the development of a division, the actual ascriptions are almost entirely determined by culture.

With sex, as with ethnicity, the distinctions are primarily used culturally to define role and status -- to the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others.

What are we trying to do?

Thus we come to the Catch-22 of our present concerns. It is hard to imagine a non-discriminatory, unprejudiced society in which race and sex matters. Yet in our efforts to reach that goal, our society and its institutions are currently sending the conflicting message that they are extremely important.

For example, our laws against discriminatory practices inevitably heighten general consciousness of race and sex as an issue. The media, drawn inexorably to conflict, mentions race five times as often as taxes in covering urban politics. And the very groups that have suffered under racial or sexual stereotypes have in recent years consciously fostered countering stereotypes as a form of protection, e.g.the black power and gay pride movements and the aggressive display of ethnic, religious or sexual symbols.

Thus, we find ourselves in the odd position of attempting to create a society that shuns invidious distinctions while at the same time -- often with fundamentalist or regulatory fervor -- accentuating those distinctions.

To the extent that we accept the imperatives of the day, this may seem inevitable. But if history had taken a slightly

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different course our perspective might also be different. Consider, for example, the decline of integration as a social goal in the wake of the black power movement of the sixties. There were good reasons for this decline given the implicit doctrine of one-way integration: no one had talked of whites becoming integrated into black society. But something else was thrown out with integration; the faint glow of cultural relativism and the struggle to find not merely equity but positive good in multi-cultural living.

Black power had its roots in the deep frustration of the civil rights movement with the progress towards some sustainable form of equality. In 1963, Howard Zinn, a white professor at Spellman College, told a SNCC conference that the ballot box would not give blacks much power. Zinn said SNCC should build up "centers of power outside the official political mechanism."

This was a time when the official symbol of the Alabama Democratic Party included a banner reading "White Supremacy -- For the Right." The SNCC-organized Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party had attempted to be seated at the national Democratic convention and was rebuffed. SNCC communications director Julian Bond twice won election to the Georgia legislature, and twice that body refused to seat him. Jerry Demuth, writing in *The Idler* in October 1966 asked: "After Julian Bond, Atlantic City and the Alabama Democratic Party with its proclamation of white supremacy, what is there except a Black Panther Party?"

The voices of black power of the time were varied. Two months after being replaced as SNCC chair by the more militant Stokely Carmichael, John Lewis explained: "I support the concept of black power and I have tried repeatedly to articulate it to people in terms they can understand, so that they will know it is for civil rights, not against whites."

The National Committee of Negro Churchmen of the National Council of Churches tried to integrate black power and integration in an August 1965 newspaper ad:

A more equal sharing of power is precisely what is required as the precondition of authentic human interaction. We understand the growing demand of Negro and white youth for a more honest kind of integration: one which increases rather than decreases the capacity of the disinherited to participate with power in all the structures of our common life. Without this capacity to participate with power -- i.e. to have some organized political and economic strength to really influence people with whom one interacts -- integration is not meaningful. For the issue is not one of racial balance but of honest racial interaction.

But this was a hope far from the then current reality and many more blacks listened to the view of Carmichael: "Integration is an insidious subterfuge for white supremacy."

Since then black power as a concept has flourished and waned in inverse proportion to the reality and potential of that power. Today, with black America deep into its second post-Reconstruction era, it is not surprising to see a revival of separatism. But whereas black power came to the sixties as a prophetic revelation catalytic in force, in the eighties it often seems only the rhetoric of the desperate, offering a plausible explanation for the present but no meaningful path out of it.

In any case, we have moved so far from the goal of integration, or of 'honest interracial interaction," that those few hardy souls who still seek to foster it can discover themselves not only politically incorrect but potentially illegal. In one small example, an integrated housing project that operated on the principle of "controlled occupancy" found itself running afoul of the administration's reading of civil rights laws. This despite the fact that the project's policy actually attained the goals of those laws while at the same time mitigating a major obstacle to integration: fear that one ethnic group will overwhelm another. Our civil rights laws approach fear by simply making its manifestations illegal. Nothing in human history suggests that this works. That it doesn't work is glaringly indicated by the fact that much of America -- black and white -- has simply given up on housing integration of any meaningful variety.

We have reduced our ethnic problems to a matter of regulation and power, and in the process, without even recognizing it, have reduced our ambitions to the achievement of a tolerable stalemate rather than a creating a truly better society. The positive aspects of racial intermingling are virtually ignored and non-discrimination has become merely another symbol of virtuous citizenship -- like not double-parking.

Martin Luther King said:

Something must happen so as to touch the hearts and souls of men that they will come together, not because the law says it, but because it is natural and right.

Sorry, Martin, but it's not the way we're headed. Our approach to prejudice and discrimination is not unlike our approach to drugs: We plan to simply rule them out of existence.

Pretending we're the same

It looks good, but we're only fooling ourselves. When Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder suggested that there were physical differences between black and white athletes, CBS took the currently acceptable approach to racial matters: it fired him. Some months later NBC did a serious program on the subject, Jonathan Rowe wrote a thoughtful piece in the *Washington Monthly,* but for the most part in the wake of the 1200 news stories that followed there was a sense that CBS was right because Jimmy the Greek (note that he even stereotypes himself) had violated the ethnic decorum of the eighties. In fact, the public evidence doesn't reveal whether Snyder, -- while indiscriminately mixing fact, folklore and fiction -- was being prejudiced or not. It is clear, however that he had committed the mortal sin of suggesting that one ethnic group might differ in some respect from another ethnic group. By present standards, this is offensive because our view of equality presumes homogeneity, indeed demands it. It is still too hard for us to imagine liking someone who is really different from ourselves.

Thus we go to great lengths to prove that we are all the same, carefully avoiding such questions as why there aren't more Japanese in the NBA.

Obviously, we're not all the same. One of the reasons we feel compelled to say otherwise is because our paradigm of social justice is based strongly on competitive equality rather than on human equity. This can be seen by the fact that the only cultural trait and aptitude differences that really disturb us are ones of

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competitive significance: thigh circumference, height, math ability and so forth. We accept other noted differences -- such as varieties of hair characteristics, degree of subcutaneous fat, prevalence of sickle cell anemia -- as perfectly normal because they don't affect (or affect far less) who gets to the top.

Our inability to sort out the relative genetic, cultural and environmental causes of various traits does not, however, impede our judgements at all. It is enough that a trait difference is observed or presumed. Once noted (rightly or wrongly), our own cultural values determine its importance.

In fact, available evidence of cultural or sexual differences is often badly misinterpreted. Confusing us are such factors as the social and economic importance given a characteristic by a culture, the effect of America's de facto caste system with its ethnically or sexually assigned roles, the misinterpretation of statistical data (typically turning an average result into an absolute), the discounting of differences in access to education, employment and education, the specialization of occupation caused by limited economic opportunity, and the distortion of random pieces of historical information.

The Jimmy Snyder case is an instructive example. Snyder offered two opinions that got him into serious trouble:

o Black athletic prowess dates back to slave-breeding practices.

o There are physical differences between whites and blacks, which Jimmy referred to as the "thigh situation."

While as many as 80% of the callers to one CBS station supported Snyder's removal, Rowe in his inquiry found the story more complicated. For example, Virginia in the early 19th century exported between 6000 and 15,000 slaves a year, leading Thomas Dew of William & Mary to describe it as a "Negro raising state for other states." Rowe quoted Frederick Douglass as describing a "large able-bodied woman" bought as a "breeder." Another slave recalled "They would buy a fine girl and a fine man and just put them together like cattle."

On the other hand, Howard anthropologist Michael Blakey pointed out, breeding occurred but "it was pure and simple a matter of reproducing large numbers rather than body types. That kind of breeding couldn't possibly lead to any difference in athletic ability."

Besides, said Blakey, "Afro-Americans are one of the most genetically diverse peoples in the world" with intra-ethnic differences far greater than those of whites or orientals.

Similarly, Snyder had a weak handle on the "thigh situation." For example, while one study found that comparable height, weight-trained black athletes had a larger thigh size than white colleagues, the difference was all of 3% and that largely attributable to a similar difference in weight.

Looking back on this minor but telling flap, it is clear that the reaction to Snyder's comments were far more revealing than the comments themselves. As Rowe put it: "The Snyder bashing showed a dark side to the nation's antiracism, an intolerance and a frequent incapacity to discuss the issue of race at all."

In such matters, we tend to deal neither with understanding what the facts available to us really mean nor, more importantly, with their ultimate irrelevance to developing a world that can live decently and happily with itself. We don't spend the effort to separate facts from fictions because in either form they cut too close to our underlying inability to appreciate and celebrate our human differences. It is far easier pretend they don't exist.

Enjoying variety

Howard Platt had a different view. In the mid 1950s he taught one of two anthropology courses available in an American high school and I was lucky enough to be among his students. Mr. Platt showed us how to look at the world.

And what a wonderful world it was. Not the stultifying world of our parents, the monochromatic world of the neighborhood, the boring world of 9th grade, but a world of fantastic options, a world in which people got to cook, eat, shelter themselves, have sex, dance and pray in an extraordinary variety of ways. Mr. Platt's subliminal message of cultural relativism was simultaneously a message of freedom. You were not a prisoner of your culture; you could always go live with the Eskimos, the Indians or the Arabs. By the time the bell sounded I was often ready to move.

Mr. Platt did not exorcise racism, and he did not teach ethnic harmony, cultural sensitivity, the regulation of equality, or the morality of non-prejudiced behavior. He didn't need to. He taught something far more important, something missing from the present discourse on race, something lacking from the student newspaper I'm following, something absent from college curricula. Mr. Platt opened a world of variety, not for us to fear but to learn about, appreciate and enjoy. It was not an obstacle, but a gift.

I have often since thought that one of the greatest contributions to ethnic harmony in this country would be to have all 9th graders take a course in anthropology. At the very moment that their view of the earth was becoming fixed, they could learn what a minute portion of the world their own culture and values represented. And they could learn that appreciation of their own values and of those of others were not mutually exclusive.

Learning to keep quiet

It is small wonder that most Americans do not learn this. How would they? We don't teach it. So when a person arrives at a college or on a job with nothing but the acquired myopia of their own family and culture to guide them, we express shock at their limitations and, if we are politically correct, punish them for their lack of understanding.

The aforementioned student newspaper devoted a page recently to the report of a disciplinary hearing by the University Council on Student Affairs. The case involved a student who had become involved in a "confrontational exchange" with another student, in the course of which threatening to "fucking kill you."

The report continued:

At some point in their exchange, the charged student also made remarks to the complainant using the words 'fag' and 'buttfucker.' While both the timing and exact content of the remark were unclear to the Council, the

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UCSA decided that the words were used in a homophobic and harassing manner.

The committee split on how to handle the matter. The minority of 4 wanted the student suspended or dismissed. The majority of 7 approved 'university sanction,' a form of probation. The committee also ordered the student to meet with a dean to "discuss his homophobic harassment."

That was it. This university, which prides itself in providing its students with a liberal education, had responded to a manifestation of a student's cultural limitations with punishment and a visit to the dean.

Let us imagine -- only imagine -- how this situation developed. It is not unreasonable to suspect that the student grew up in a family, school and community that either tolerated or encouraged such behavior. The student never took anthropology from Mr. Platt. In his community, homosexuality may well have been so suppressed that he may have never met someone openly gay until he attended college. He was in such matters, uneducated and miseducated.

If he had gone to college similarly disadvantaged in a foreign language, he would have been required to bring his skill up to par by taking one or more language courses. But the sad silent truth of the incident described here is that most universities have no effective educational method to deal with ethnic miseducation or cultural illiteracy. Like society as a whole, they just try to rule it out of existence.

Now let us imagine what the student may have learned from this incident. In fact, I don't have to imagine. I heard it on the flight up for a parents' weekend. A college student from the south was visiting his freshman brother. How does he like the school, he was asked. "He likes it but he's having a hard time with the liberals up there." There was a pause and then he added, "But he's learning to keep his mouth shut."

These are the people we should be worrying about and aren't. These are the people who can carry their fears and prejudices silently into every corner of their life, serving as human Stealth bombers of dissatisfaction and hostility. This university, dedicated to turning ignorance into wisdom, finds itself instead driving doubt underground within a few week's of the student's arrival at school.

If we extend our imaginations still further, we can think of ways that the situation might have been handled so that the university not only relieved the specific problem but actually assisted in reaching the goal of pluralism that it professes.

For example, the university could have taken a more sophisticated view of the adolescent acting out of cultural biases. It is, one gathers, somewhat intimidated by the demands of various student minority groups, which often favor punishment (or at best indoctrination) over education. But if it were courageous enough, it could have said something like this:

"Look, we have a problem here and we're going to deal with it in the way that we know best. We are going to have this student take our basic course on understanding other cultures. And we are going to have him join one of our workshops on inter-cultural relations. At these workshops, he will be able to call his antagonist a "fag" or a "buttfucker" but he also will have to hear what others think of him. And we have found that, given a bit of time, the participants run out of epithets and begin talking about what's really on their minds, and finally begin to understand each other in a way that suppressing feelings never will produce. He may be forced to look at the gays in that room as individuals for the first time in his life.

"Further, and not less important, the gays and others in the room may discover that the student's prejudice reflect only a part, maybe even an atypical part, of his character, and that his comments had stereotyped him as much as them. They may wish to discuss Martin Luther King's philosophy that injustice oppresses both the victimized and the victimizer, leading to what Andrew Young has called a sense of 'no-fault justice.' And together they may want to examine some of the less anointed prejudices abroad on campus, like those against southerners, students from blue collar families, and born-again Christians."

It would also help if such universities provided places and occasions for peoples of different cultures to present their values in a non-confrontational manner. The underlying technique of cultural empowerment these days is to encourage sympathy and, if that doesn't work, fear. But there's a long road between sympathy and respect and even further to appreciation. If the best we can hope for is a society in which everyone avoids offending everyone else it will be a sad future. We need places where people can learn about others in an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality, where stranger and native can share the satisfactions of their cultures. We need events without the lectures, without the put-downs, without the complaints -- however justified. We need occasions that enrich not only the keepers of a tradition but those outside it. For it is in appreciation that we will discover the real reason to be decent to each other and to find pleasure in each other.

But how rare such an approach is in this country. It happens when we travel to another land. We gladly extend ourselves in this manner to a foreign guest. But if the stranger is another American of a different cultural tradition, the principle just passes us by.

There are the happy exceptions. A few years ago my wife and I were invited to attend the seder of some friends. We were invited because these friends were among those Jews who observed the custom of inviting a non-Jew to the ceremony. It was both mysterious and wonderful to find yourself not only participating in a ritual not your own but, in fact, having a ritualistic role in it by your very non-belonging.

In describing the meaning of this custom the other day, my friend said it was an attempt to "universalize the experience." The liberation of Jews from bondage, the journey through the desert and the receiving of the 10 Commandants was a "story applicable to all people." And she recalled the biblical injunction to Jews to remember that they were once strangers in the land of Egypt and that they must never oppress a stranger.

She warned me, though, that the custom was not typical of seders. Or for that matter, I thought later, of much else in this country. Yet what a powerful simple example it was of the sort of thing we could be doing to bring the disparate pieces of America a little closer.

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Education and Comstockery

The blows and setbacks in intercultural relations of the past decade have left us all a bit cynical and pessimistic. Yet a recent Washington Post poll found that the percentage of whites with negative views of blacks had dropped between 1981 and 1989 in almost every category. The most dramatic exception was among those with less than a 9th grade education, 73% of whom expressed negative views in 1989 as opposed to 64% in 1981. 38% of those with some high school expressed negative views and the totals continued to drift down as education level increased, with only 9% of those with postgraduate education having negative views -- the lowest percentage of any category listed, including those based on party affiliation, ideology, age, residence, and region. Even income did not make as big a difference. Bad as our multi-cultural education and the messages from Washington have been during this period, education clearly has had a major impact.

But we're talking real education here, not the path of campus Comstockery that some of our universities have chosen, a censorious policy that is so strikingly at odds with their own profession of intellectual freedom.

Roxanne Schnider of Dennison University, recently told a conference on campus racial problems: "Our campus claims to accept everyone, but if you look around you see that blacks stay with blacks and Orientals with Orientals and each group together. We don't really get to know each other or like each other. Everyone thinks they are aware, but they're not."

College Press Service reports that more than ten prominent universities and colleges have approved rules restricting speech relating to sex and race. These rules are filled with First Amendment-burning strictures against language that "stereotypes," "stigmatizes, or "victimizes." Some examples:

- The University of Michigan attempted to suppress all speech that gave offense "on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, creed, ancestry, age, marital status, handicap or Vietnam-era veteran status." A judge fortunately threw that one out.
- The University of Connecticut feels empowered to invoke sanctions against students who engage in "inappropriately directed laughter."

As George Will noted:

"There are many subjects 'too sensitive' to talk about freely on campuses that are patrolled by prowling sensitivity police. Courses on, for example, the history or sociology of race can be considered too problematical to take."

The assumption that we must hide our cultural antipathies has led nowhere but to the concealment of our antipathies. Our very politeness opposes our goal, because, when hidden, these antipathies can not be dealt with and changed.

Saul Alinsky, in *Rules for Radicals*, describes an alternative approach. In one incident, he attempted to get an Indian group organized. The Indians argued that they couldn't organize. Pressed, one said, "Well, you see, if we organize that means getting out and fighting the way you are telling us to do and that would mean that we would be corrupted by the white man's culture and lose our own values." Alinsky asked them to describe these values. "Creative fishing" was given as an example. Asked to explain, the reply came "Well, to begin with, when we go out fishing, we get away from everything. We get way out in the woods." Alinsky: "Well, we whites don't exactly go fishing in Times Square, you know." Reply: "Yes, but it's different with us. When we go out, we're out on the water and you can hear the lap of the waves on the bottom of the canoe, and the birds in the trees and the leaves rustling and -- you know what I mean?" Alinsky: "No, I don't know what you mean. Furthermore, I think that that's just a pile of shit. Do you believe it yourself?"

There was a stunned silence but what Alinsky had done was far more useful than being polite. As one Indian described it later to the white Canadian government workers in the room: "When Mr. Alinsky told us we were full of shit, that was the first time a white man has really talked to us as equals. You would never say that to us. You would always say, 'Well, I can see your point of view but I'm a little confused,' and stuff like that. In other words you treat us as children." And the Indians decided to organize.

Alinsky's advice to organizers was to be yourself. By being himself, and challenging others to do the same, he broke through the ritualistic ethnic games people of all cultures play with each other. He was not polite, he was not politically correct, he was just honest. On some campuses it's risky to try it these days.

Dealing with the Isms

Linguists have noted that when something matters greatly in a culture there are many words for it. Thus the Eskimos have no single word for 'snow,' only for its many varieties, and we have no single word for a four-wheeled vehicle. Yet when dealing with issues of race and sex, we have comfortably settled on racism and sexism, two overburdened words called to fulfill an astounding collection of functions. The net effect is to dissipate the power of the most violent acts and to exaggerate minor transgressions. Linguistically, we have put the events in South Africa and the failure of a professor to assign any reading by a black author on the same level. This remarkable, and little noted, phenomenon contributes nothing to dealing with the problem at hand.

It is however a sign of the degree to which our discourse on the subject has retreated into an arena of safe and unproductive abstraction.

If we were really going to do something about the problem we would have more words for it. We would discriminate, linguistically, tactically and philosophically between a black saying, "Nigger," a white freshman using the epithet and a white councilmember in Houston, Texas (as occurred the other day) saying the same thing. We would be able to describe the difference between the prejudice that comes from being taught that another ethnic group is responsible for your economic problems from that which comes from believing another ethnic group is trying to take your power. We would distinguish between the misguided and the misinformed, the victims of warped acculturation, the viscerally hating, the cynically manipulating, the indifferent, the culturally jingoistic, and the paranoid.

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We don't make these distinctions today and as a result, tend to favor one recipe for all. It turns out to be no recipe, however, only words as lazy as our actions.

The relation between words and action goes further. There is, for example, a tendency for minorities to blend themselves into mythical "communities" for the sake of solidarity and empowerment. But at some point these start reinforcing the very stereotypes being fought against. While the strongest case against stereotyping comes from revealing the variety within one of these communities, there is great hesitancy to do so.

Thus we fight a battle with gossamer abstractions. What exactly does "confronting racism against the black community" mean? It means everything anybody wants it to mean and so really means nothing. A time-killer while we figure what to do.

If we really wish to deal with problems of ethnic and sexual relations we are going to have to become a lot more analytical and give up the comfort of ritualistic rhetoric. As things stand now, America's cultures are standing on their separate turfs hurling symbols at each other. And some have divined in this the message that it is all right to hurl other things as well.

Working our way out of this jam will take more than rules and rhetoric. It will take a willingness to come to together, to learn how to enjoy our differences, and to speak honestly without violence of our fears and, yes, even of our prejudices. It will take the development of means of revealing the individual under the mask of culture. It will above all take a revival of the almost forgotten faith that there is a powerful advantage in doing these things. For without that, without believing it is 'natural and right," everything else we do will be a lie no matter how politely we treat each other. --*Sam Smith*

DRUG BUSTS

It's early yet but the tide may be turning in the drug wars. A quiet change is occurring in the rhetoric of some politicians -- more favorable to treatment less unrelievedly macho. But don't expect the drug ayatollahs to admit they were wrong; that's not how Washington works. Henry Kissinger isn't still on television for nothing and we can expect William Bennett to be similarly nimble. But if it helps to end the madness of the "war on drugs" it's a small price to pay.

For example, a local politican ruminated the other night on TV about the problem of finding money to deal with both drug abuse and senior citizens, clearly implying that he wasn't going to declare political war on the latter to win victory over the former. George Schultz came out for legalization, the *LA Times* headlined "Drug Legalization: Interest Rises in Prestigious Circles," and Lewis Lapham in *Harpers* wrote that the drug war accomplished nothing for society "except immediate access to an unlimited fund of resentment and unspecific rage."

There are even doubters within the federal government. K. Brooks Thomas, regional counsel in Miami for the Customs Service was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that he does not support legalization

LETTERS

Circular firing squad

Too often crack addiction leads to lost opportunities (and lost desire) for meaningful relationships. Friends and family take a poor back seat to the number one friend, crack.

As he promotes the administration's new drug policy, Director William Bennett contends that drug users must be held 'accountable' for their role in an "international conspiracy." What part do the crack users play in the international cocaine trade? They play the victim. They're being poisoned. Prison is a place for people who do bad things to other people. Not for people who do bad things to themselves. I don't want the government turning private morality into public policy. A war on drugs in which users are the enemy? That's about as logical as a circular firing sqad.

Jeff Bullock
Phoenixville, Pa

Own up

OK, Sam Smith, drug use is obviously a matter of constitutional rights for you. So own up. What's your drug of choice? Marijuana? Cocaine? How long can you stay without drugs? One hour? One day? One week? What drug dealers do you support? What drug crime do you abet?

The message from our white "progressives" is perfectly clear: If you want to be a true-blue progressive, you must do drugs. If you don't, you are a prig. Not only are white progressives, at heat, little middle-class bourgeois with no understanding of social issues who need all the dutch courage of doping themselves out of their mind to espouse progressive values, but they never view themselves as drug abusers or addicts.

Marie Grosdidier de Matons
Washington, DC

My first drug of choice was corn silk. As my parents might have warned me, smoking corn silk led inexorably to cigarettes. By the time I was in 8th grade I had become so proficient in the habit that I could smoke a butt half way through and then flip the entire lighted cylinder in my mouth using just by tongue and lip. This didn't improve the high but it seemed to impress my colleagues. During the sixties I mostly used scotch and pipe tobacco. I tried marijuana once but suffered the reaction of a Virginia farmer who told me, "It seems like for a man who's lived on whiskey all his life them marijoowana cigarettes don't do much." I can report, however, that the experience had absolutely no effect on my political philosophy. Since then I have tried, in the manner of W. C. Fields, to live "an entire month on nothing but food and water," yet find that I still enjoy a scotch or two. If you are looking for ideological meaning in this, I recommend to you the poet Burns's thought that "freedom and whiskey go together."

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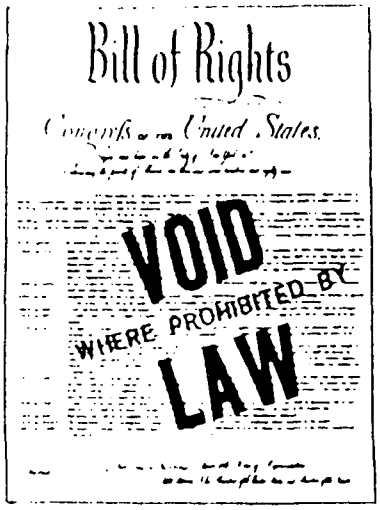

but was "appalled when member of Congress indicated it would be unthinkable to debate such a thing. The methods we're applying simply aren't working."

Establishment Defectors

Here are some of members of the American political, social and journalistic establishment who have raised serious questions about the Bush-Bennett War on Drugs, or have supported legalization or decriminalization:

William F. Buckley, journalist
Milton Friedman, economist
Kurt Schmoke, mayor of Baltimore
George Schultz, former Secretary of State
Lewis Lapham, editor of *Harpers*
Tom Wicker, *New York Times*
Patrick Murphy, former NYC police commissioner
Nathan Nadalman, Princeton University
Dr. Lester Grinspoon, Harvard Medical School

If anything puts a damper on the drug war it probably won't be morality but money. Both local and federal politicians are beginning to realize the people want not only their enthusiasm but results -- without cutting anything else.

You can see signs of this in the way Bennett is handling the matter. His routine seems to be to go around the country urging draconian measures on state and local governments. As one observer put it: "Here are some bad ideas; now you put them in *your* statutes." Bennett's advocacy doesn't cost much and if any of the measures work he can claim credit; If they don't he'll deny culpability

The danger is, of course, is that some localities are biting, especially on ideas that seem cheap. Maryland's governor wants to take away the professional licences of those who use or sell drugs. And the Fairfax County, Va., school system is prepared to test its teachers and administrators to see if they had wine with lunch, despite Prohibition having been repealed a half century ago. Up in Boston the police have taken to warrantless street searches as their contribution to the war. According to a lawsuit filed there, one man was searched merely because he wore a New York Giants cap and T-shirt -- and thus presumably belonged to a gang of the same name. Turns out he was just a Giants fan. And in California, the state has ruled that persons using drugs not only can be fired but lose their unemployment benefits as well.

There lots of inexpensive ways to pretend you're fighting a war on drugs. Finding methods that are both constitutional and cheap is a little harder.

Francis Ridley Jr. in a letter to the *Washington Post*, got to the core of the drug war's underlying illogic when he spoke of the "increasingly widespread perception that you first punish the illness called substance addiction, then hope that the punishment results in rehabilitation. "

Ridley points out that "Substance addiction, now recognized by widespread scientific authority, including the American Medical Authority, as a physical illness acquired in a very high proportion of cases through genetically transmitted predisposition, should be treated the same in the workplace as are most other chronic illnesses."

Other disabled Americans can expect to benefit from a range of services and rights. Only the drug disabled are excluded. For them we prescribe jail or unemployment. For them we have not progressed much beyond the treatment prescribed for lepers in Leviticus: "Upon whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean."

The number of women between 15 and 44 who have died of AIDS is up 75% between 1986 and last year. The disease is now the 8th leading cause of death of women of child-bearing age. Black women are nine times more likely to be affected than white women. Experts say that 70% of the women contracted the disease by becoming infected by drug needles or having sex with an intra-venenous drug user.

A happy note from the front: *Building Washington,* a Washington contractors' magazine, headlined a story: "The Prison Market: President Bush's War on Crime brings opportunity to the construction industry."

Last year Customs Commissioner William von Raab announced a zero tolerance policy under which planes, boats and vehicles containing even minute quantities of illegal drugs would be seized. "There will be no mercy," he said. Well, since then there have been three changes in the policy, including an increase in the amount of drugs that would trigger seizure. Now Customs says it will use a summons procedure for vessels, provided only small quantities are found. Land-based seizures will continue. Customs has seized over 8000 personal vehicles, nearly 500 trucks, 190 boats and 13 aircraft since the program initially began.

A state senator in New York has introduced a bill that would legalize drugs there. Sen. Joseph Galiber said his proposal was years from becoming law but then "five

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years ago, this legislation would probably have gotten you run out of town." And in California, two legalization initiatives have been filed.

Ronald Siegel, an associate professor of psychopharmacology at UCLA has written a book called *Intoxication* in which he argues that "intoxication has functioned like the basic drives of hunger, thirst or sex, sometimes overshadowing all other activities in life. Intoxication is the fourth drive. *** The solution to the drug problems of our species begin when we acknowledge the legitimate place of intoxication in our behavior." Further, adds Siegel, "The pursuit of intoxication with drugs is a primary motivational force in the behavior of organisms. Birds gorge themselves on inebriating berries, then fly with reckless abandon. Cats eagerly sniff aromatic 'pleasure' plants, then play with imaginary objects. Cows that brows special range weeds will twitch, shake, and stumble back to the plants for more. Elephants purposely get drunk on fermented fruit."

WEATHER REPORT

Public Citizen reports that numerous nuclear power plants are constructed close to earthquake fault lines. Says PC: "Following an earthquake, a crack in the piping which carries cooling water to the reactor core could result in a rapid loss of coolant. Within minutes thereafter, the fuel rods in the core could melt leading to an explosion. Radioactive materials would almost certainly leak from the reactor under any circumstance and particularly if an explosion breached the reactor's containment dome. According to government studies, a major nuclear accident of this sort could result in thousands of immediate deaths as well as billions of dollars in property damage."

Health care is warming up as a major issue for the next decade. A recent note in *Psychology Today* cites a good reason why. A survey has found that 89% of American citizens consider the present system fundamentally flawed. In contrast a majority of Canadian citizens like their system of national insurance and 70% of Britons prefer their system to either that of Canada or America, despite its flaws. Says *PT* "Only US residents are so disenchanted with their system that they'd swap it for another country's -- Canada's -- by a 2 to 1 margin." Yet another story the American media has missed.

Who won the Cold War? While American liberals and conservatives argue their role, the real winner may be the Scandinavians. AP reported recently that there has been a parade of Eastern European visitors trying to see how some of the northern countries' social and economic successes could be transported to their country. Even Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze was quoted in a Swedish paper saying, "The Swedish model has interested us for a long time, now more than ever, both on a practical and theoretical level." Sweden has been giving top priority to retraining workers, keeping employment high, and phasing out heavy industry for the past two decades. While inflation is above 6 percent, unemployment is only 1.5%.

Latest marriage between activism and technology is the fax-in. *Actuel* in Paris and the *LA Weekly* have both published special Chinese language supplements along with a list of 6500 Chinese fax numbers. Readers are invited to fax the supplement to a number in China. *Spy* magazine is expected to follow suit.

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Paul Krassner reports that Eastern Airlines has offered 50% discount and frequent flyer awards to funeral homes that ship dead bodies in the cargo bellies of its jetliners.

GULP, the General Union of Left Handed People, has threaten reprisals against the London Underground for installing automatic ticket barriers that discriminate against lefties. Said GULP's representative, this is "typical of the one-sided, domineering approach of the right handed society in which we live."

A reader in New York City points out that Michael Milken earned a half billion dollars in one year before his wings were clipped. He suggests it helps put things into perspective when one realizes that we are spending only 17 $Milkens a year on the drug wars. Or I guess you could put it at 4 $Lincolns, i.e. four times what it will cost to bail out the Lincoln Savings and Loan. Speaking of which, it is probably worth remembering the next time you see Federal Reserve Board chair Alan Greenspan being quoted, that he's the guy who wrote of Lincoln that it was "a financially strong institution that presents no foreseeable risk" to the government or to depositors.

This month's Outstanding Local Initiative Against the Constitution Award goes to the Connecticut State Police who, according to a federal lawsuit, illegally recorded telephone conversations between defense lawyers and their clients for nine years.

Here's some of the best from William Lutz's new book, *Doublespeak:*

Selective development: When George Mason University raids professors from another campus. They call it *quality recovery* at Indiana and *preventive retention* at Minnesota.

Incontinent ordnance: Pentagonese for bombs accidentally dropped on civilians.

Nonretained: Fired.

Richard Reeves, the noted journalist, started life as an engineering student. He switched to journalism when, upon graduation, he discovered that "Texas Instruments was selling everything we knew for $9."

Field Notes

Earthwatch: In 1990, Earthwatch will sponsor 106 scientific field projects in 46 countries and 27 states in such areas as archaeology, endangers species, public health, rain forest biology and animal behavior. Volunteers pay a share of costs. *Info: Kara Bettigole, Earthwatch, PO Box 403, 680 Mt. Auburn St, Watertown MA 02272.*

Domino's Boycott: Students around the country are boycotting Domino's Pizza because of the pro-life activities of the company's owner, including a $50,000 donation to an anti-abortion group. *Info: Lynn Vietzer of Students Organizing Students (212-661-1033).*

Jim Hightower tells of a Texas trial lawyer who stole from the rich and gave approximately half to the poor.

The cumulative wealth of the Forbes 400 richest people in America could run the government for four months.

A New York gay activist has filed charges against Roger Ailes for alleged assault at a Rudy Giuliani fundraiser. *The Village Voice* reports that the activist accused Ailes of grabbing his neck and choking him. *The Voice* also quotes a 1984 *Washington Post* story in which Ailes was reportedly involved in a fracas with two gays in a Texas hotel lobby. Further *Newsweek* said during the 1988 campaign that Bush should stop using a certain hand gesture because "you look like a fucking pansy."

Jesse Yoder, a philosophy professor at the University of Lowell in Massachusetts had founded a group called "New Democrats." The group claims the support of Eugene McCarthy and Gary Hart and will try to bridge the gap between 60s activists and those raised under Reagan. The New Democrats hope to turn the Democratic Party from control by the "political managers, technocrats and media consultants."

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